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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 001317

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SUBJECT: PM BANNY: THE TANDEM WITH GBAGBO IS BROKEN

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR AUBREY HOOKS FOR REASONS 1.4 B/D.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Banny told the Ambassador on November 28 that Cote d'Ivoire is again in crisis: the tandem with President Gbagbo has not been working well since UN Resolution 1721 was adopted November 1 and is now broken. The PM said he was not even informed of the decrees that President Gbagbo had signed reinstating those directors suspended for responsibility for the toxic waste scandal; this was a serious blow that the PM could not simply ignore. The changes that President Gbagbo made at the Fraternite-Matin newspaper and at the RTI broadcast authority without consulting Banny, who is also Minister of Communications as well as Prime Minister, were further gratuitous insults. The PM remains in Yamoussoukro out of concern for his own safety and the safety of his staff. The PM commented that he did not know how far President Gbagbo would go in trying to have his own way. He commented to several ministers present at the meeting that they may all find themselves dismissed within the next few days. Banny said he did not plan to resign, although he was convinced that President Gbagbo was trying to push him into resigning. The Prime Minister requested that the Ambassador try to reason with President Gbagbo to get the political process back on track. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (2) Prime Minister Banny invited the Ambassador to a meeting in Yamoussoukro that lasted nearly two hours on November 28. The Prime Minister invited four ministers and a parliamentary deputy to join the meeting for the last thirty minutes. The PM began by stating that President Gbagbo's surprise unilateral actions had again brought the country to a crisis. He commented that President Gbagbo controls the thermostat that allows Gbagbo to turn up the political temperature at will. Banny recalled that he was the author of the tandem concept, which was inclusive by its very nature. He had repeatedly stated in public that he was Prime Minister because President Gbagbo had accepted him as a consensual candidate. Banny said he does not know where President Gbagbo wants to take the country. He is convinced that President Gbagbo is trying to push him into making a serious mistake or into resigning. However, the PM said he was committed to a mission, not a post, and does not plan to resign. However, if he is unable to carry out the mission given to him by the international community, he will have to inform the international community of the obstacles he is facing. The PM requested that the Ambassador try to reason with President Gbagbo to get the political process back on track. The PM noted that some bridges had been burned, but in the interest of Cote d'Ivoire, it was critical to relaunch the political process.

¶3. (C) The PM confirmed that when he and President Gbagbo spoke on the telephone on Saturday morning (November 25), the President had made no mention of plans to sign decrees. Reinstating those who had been suspended for responsibility

for the toxic waste scandal was a repudiation of the PM's efforts to put an end to impunity. It was a serious blow to the tandem relationship. He noted that in his communique he sought to avoid confrontation and simply called for the President to suspend the implementation of the decrees; he did not challenge the President's right to issue decrees. However, those surrounding the President tried to portray the PM's communique in the worst possible way. The PM added that additional decrees replacing the leadership at Fraternite-Matin newspaper and RTI, the broadcast authority, further undermined him as PM because is is also Minister of Communications. He was particularly disturbed that the President justified dismissing the Director of RTI because RTI had read the PM's communique on television. Banny commented that RTI is responsible for reporting the news, not the contents of official communiques.

¶4. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question, the PM said that technical work on identification and demobilization continued, although neither process was moving forward at this time. The PM said he was determined to get to elections by October 2007, and while a month has now been lost, it was easily possible to organize elections in October 2007 if a minimum of political will can be assembled. The current crisis is putting at risk elections for the foreseeable future.

¶5. (C) The PM said he remains in Yamoussoukro for reasons of security. He said his staff were subjected to strict body and car searches when they entered the security perimeter of the Presidency. The PM said he had information that the Presidency had plans to have the Young Patriots attack him in his home in Abidjan. He added that he also had a report that the regional military commander in Yamoussoukro had been

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ordered to arrest him, although no attempt had yet been made. Leon Koffi, one of the PM's closest advisors, told the Ambassador afterwards that he had just returned from a month outside the country because of death threats. After Koffi was ambushed in his car in Abidjan, the Prime Minister insisted that he leave the country for a while.

¶6. (C) The Ministers who joined the meeting expressed concern that President Gbagbo is in effect consolidating his power and making himself a dictator. They were particularly disturbed by the President's decision to replace the director of RTI, whose nomination represented a compromise included in the Pretoria Accords. Secondly, President Gbagbo's instructions to RTI not to publish opposition communiques was a cause of serious concern as it would be impossible to go to elections if the opposition is denied access to television and radio. The Ministers were vocal in demanding a strong reaction from the international community. The Ambassador noted that the international community is worried by the turn of events and that the International Working Group had a regularly scheduled meeting for Friday, December 1, that would be discussing these issues.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The Prime Minister and his staff have been completely thrown off balance by President Gbagbo's aggressive moves. They fear for their own safety and are therefore influenced by wild rumors, given their state of mind. However, their general fears are likely justified, particularly given the track record of the Presidency. The PM knows that Gbagbo is capable of bullying and then pulling back, but the PM also knows that the tandem will no longer be what it never really was: a serious partnership between the President and Prime Minister to take the country out of crisis. The President has stepped outside of the Pretoria Accords. Although rumors of a change of government are circulating wildly in Abidjan, it remains to be seen whether President Gbagbo will go all the way and step completely outside of UN Resolution 1721. In many respects, Gbagbo's actions this week are reminiscent of his actions in January 2006 when he flexed his muscles to remind the newly

designated Prime Minister and the international community that Gbagbo is in the driver's seat. Gbagbo is a clever tactician, but a poor strategist, and recent history is replete with examples of rash actions he has undertaken without thinking through the consequences.

Hooks